6/18/12

Dear Joe,

"Josiah Royce, in he firstvolme of his work The World and the Individual (1899) has formulated the following: 'Let us imagine that a portion of the soil of England has been levelled off perfectly and that on it a cartographer traces a map of England. The job is perfect; there is no detailof the soil of England, no matter how minute, that is not registered on the map; everything has there its correspondence. This map, in such a case, should contain a map of the map, which should contain a map of the map of the map, and so on to infinity." Borges, "Partial Magic in the Quixote". Meanwhile you walk the chartered streets, which I always read as appropriated, possessed by the privileged, more than mapped, but the mapping is an appropriation. I think often of artists in wilderness--Audubon, Catherwood, Catlin,--in relation to maplessness. Curiously on the moon there is the map before there is the landscape, and there will never be an experience of the moon not mediated by a map, not comparable to the pleasure (notes from Cocoa Beach) of using the actual place to verify the map. Polanyi writes (Personal Knowledge p.194) "And again, howevermeticulously descriptive and plainly expressive a work of art may be, it must never come any closer in refering to experience than crystallography does to crystals; no closer than a representation of a conceivable experience, framed in its own harmonious terms, can come to actualexperience. Precise statements of fact or exact expressions of sentiment contained in a work of art tendto flatten it out to a map, a report or a personal communication." But of course the only story in Fiction which interested me ends, "As children, we walked on Sunday afternoonsat a speed of one-half meter per second alongside the soccerball...But once when the river was swollen we had to run alongside the ballat a speed of five meters per second to fish the ball out of the water" "Abstraction of the Ball that Fellin the River" Peter Handke.

I think the point of the map would be the simplicity orcomplexity of the rules of mapping, and the relation of those rules (color codes, proportions, abstraction of topography)—of those operations for translating the map--to the rest of the book.

You sound as though you are in the literary snake-pit. I read about myself being described to Iris Murdoch, and contract into my dimensions of provincial English teacher. I do envy you meeting her, but since her own novels are about people finding the person they are equal to, locking into compound equitability, I am afraid I would do an imitation (mapping) of an Iris Murdoch character.

By the way, cousin Robert introduced himself to her after her talk here a few weeks ago; I could have gone but declined the ticket because the hours were children's hours and it was such a public pompous occasion. Her talk, printed in NYReview of Books, is not as interesting as her novels; there are thematic implications in the novels she pulls back from discussing discursively, or else she knows as novelist better than she knows as philosopher. I wish she'd say something more about that "other world" mentioned at the end of the Unicorn. What I really would like to do would be to assign her a theme on Plato's Sophist 248a. Taylor, in his edition, inserts the word not in the key sentence. Those English can really trim a hedge... (In fairness Jowett glosses it accurately and anachronistically in the margin, using energy which apparently doesn't exist yet, until Aristotle invents it in the Rhetoric).

I'm trying to get the children ready for a party at Hornick's for Joyce Maynard. I'm just changing my socks and I'm ready, wilted on humid day, with feet like pincushions.

E.L.Doctorow The Book of Daniel is worth reading, although since my interest in style is in loyalty (commitment, non-possession as subsidiaries) I do wish he would think through the relations between the Isaacsons' (Ethel and Julius Rosenberg) alleged disloyalty/treason/espionage and the relations of his own style to its homeland existence, whether the fact and matter of fact is to be betrayed for the transcendental and/or imagined ("I suppose you think I can't do the electrocution... I will show you that I can do the electrocution"), and whether the cleverness of threatening the (insane) daughter of the electrocuted spies with electric shock therapy is worth it; I think when he writes for the first person narrator of himself as a criminal of perception (p.34) "But this describes just a moment's oversensitive perception by the little criminal of perception" that our themes are close, but he doesn't seem sensitive to the fact that his cleverness robs his scenes of 1st his commitment

(while commitment is one of his themes, the narrator suffering irony, and the committed sister gets actually committed ((after trying suicide in a Howard Johnson's near Boston, which I keep thinking must be the one in which I--we--had dinner on our wedding night)) in a mental hospital) and 2nd robs, criminally, of me of my confidence: and at least Melville had the decency in the Confidence Man to make the problem of style, confidence, and commitment explicit: "Strange, that in a work of amusement, this severe fidelity to real life should be exacted by any one, who, by taking up such a work, sufficiently shows that he is not unwilling to drop real life, and turn, for a time, to something different..."

Anyway I dropped this and we all went to a party given for Joyce by Joy and Ed Hornick, which was not like your party with Joyce Carol Oates and Iris Murdoch, for at least the children got to play basketball, I met Rudi Stern who does television stuff, and when we came out the car battery was dead, but I rather smoothly brought us home in a cab and will rescue the car tomorrow, with perhaps minimal drama.

Fidelity and style: Malcolm Morley says that when he was a thief he would lift the bedstead and lower it into a shoe so that the victim upon awakening would know how deft he had been. Of course even as he tells that story Malcolm does not inspire confidence; he is hardest to believe when he tells stories of his life in crime.

Our schedule changes slightly; K. and A. go to Mass. for first two weeks of July at Stephan Brecht's invitation; if I can find an invitation for Andrew I'll get an unexpected time to myself.

I'm not to work writing properly yet, if ever; I had a major illumination about continuum, immanence, and field, and lost it. It's perfect for you to read Four-Gated City in London; I doubt that you'll like the book, her lacklustre style, but I think that style is necessary for the values she is proving to exist.

In short no mumps, we're well, busy, disconnected, and I'm off uptown to rescue the car.

Love to you all, B-D